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TRIVIAL BREATH

Books by
E L I N O R W Y L I E



Poetry

NETS TO CATCH THE WIND

BLACK ARMOUR

TRIVIAL BREATH

Fiction

JENNIFER LORN

THE VENETIAN GLASS NEPHEW

THE ORPHAN ANGEL

MR. HODGE AND MR. HAZARD

T R I V I A L
B R E A T H

E L I N O R W Y L I E

M C M



X X I X

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DEDICATION

*When I was seven years old I had a primer:
The immaculate bosom of the mother-tongue
Flowed milkily in mercy to the young,
Dispensing balsam to the infant dreamer.
How delicately did the silver skimmer
Of natural love select the cream along
The honied surface of that stream of song!
That cup of pearls dissolving into dimmer!*

*That breast of twin benevolent moons! That
conduit*

*Whose veins are threaded with pellucid truth!
Into the hungry coffin and beyond it
A single uncorrupted drop of youth
Must live in elegy upon my lips
When I and chaos shall have come to grips.*

*I would that my possessions were the proper
And polished coinage of the stars and suns;
But for the earth I give you farthing bronze,
And for the planets I return you copper.
Fumes fallen from your ceremonial supper
Made aromatic harmony which once
Refreshed my childhood: even now it runs
Between our skies, the lower and the upper.*

*Oh, who was I to be so bravely suckled
At the early wells of English undefiled,
And by your grace, whose sacred hand unbuckled
Extreme Castalia for a careless child?
Yet this I grant the creature of uncommom;
She is your vassal while she is a woman.*

*That creature is your vassal ever since:
Perceiving the device upon your standard
To be the sign her infancy had pondered,
Her spirit was impulsive to convince.
If her opinion perishes or wins;
Be her fidelity approved or slandered;
The event is set: the woman never wandered
In vile devotion to a lesser prince.*

*Profuse and fabulous appeared the page
On which your youngest lessons were emblazoned:
Enchantments that unlock a crystal cage;
An alphabet with astral fire seasoned;
These are the characters of that largesse
Which gives the lavish greater to the less.*

*For that her blood is valiant and noble
I thank the language at her leaping source;
At best essential heaven; at bitter worse
A witch's brew of strong fantastic trouble:
But for your courtesy my thanks are double,
Who, as a matter of munificent course,
Diverted waves of influential force
To shape for me a rainbow-coloured bubble,*

*An innocent bird, an iridescent music,
To be my own for all the rest of living.
Oh, this was nourishment and wine and physic!
This was a proud extravagance of giving!
And I have nothing to return in kind
Save the dull mortal homage of the mind.*

“DESOLATION
IS A DELICATE THING”

Sorrow lay upon my breast more heavily than
winter clay
Lying ponderable upon the unmoving bosom
of the dead;
Yet it was dissolved like a thin snowfall; it was
softly withered away;
Presently like a single drop of dew it had
trembled and fled.

This sorrow, which seemed heavier than a
shovelful of loam,
Was gone like water, like a web of delicate frost;
It was silent and vanishing like smoke; it was
scattered like foam;
Though my mind should desire to preserve it,
nevertheless it is lost.

This sorrow was not like sorrow; it was shining
and brief;
Even as I waked and was aware of its going, it
was past and gone;
It was not earth; it was no more than a light
leaf,
Or a snowflake in spring, which perishes upon
stone.

This sorrow was small and vulnerable and
short-lived;
It was neither earth nor stone; it was silver
snow
Fallen from heaven, perhaps; it has not
survived
An hour of the sun; it is sad it should be so.

This sorrow, which I believed a gravestone
over my heart,
Is gone like a cloud; it eluded me as I woke;
Its crystal dust is suddenly broken and blown
apart;
It was not my heart; it was this poor sorrow
alone which broke.

MINOTAUR

Go study to disdain
The frail, the over-fine
Which tapers to a line
Knotted about the brain.

Unscrupulous to pinch
And polish down the thin
And fire-encasing skin:
Which pares away an inch

Of valuable soil
Whereon a god took root,
Diminishing a brute
With pumice and with oil.

Distrust the exquisite,
The sharpened silver nerve,
The lacquered, nacred curve
Wherein a moon is lit.

Aristocratic skulls
Rejected as inept
That innocency kept
'Twixt orb'd eyes of bulls.

Black lava-crust'd coins
Bear heavy brow and limb,
The monstrous stamp of him
Who sprang from Taurine loins.

Gaze ever and at length
Upon the carven head,
Devouring it as bread
To thrive upon its strength.

The sword-deflecting scar
Indented and oblique
That stripes the savage cheek;
The throat made columnar

In copper, and up-raised
To such a trumpet shape
No clangour can escape,—
These only must be praised.

This only is the cure,
To clasp the creature fast;
The flesh survives at last
Because it is not pure.

From flesh refined to glass
A god goes desert-ward,
Astride a spotted pard,
Between an ox and ass.

Let innocence enchant
The flesh to fiercer grain
More fitted to retain
This burning visitant.

CONFESSION OF FAITH

I lack the braver mind
That dares to find
The lover friend, and kind.

I fear him to the bone;
I lie alone
By the beloved one,

And, breathless for suspense,
Erect defense
Against love's violence

Whose silences portend
A bloody end
For lover never friend.

But, in default of faith,
In futile breath,
I dream no ill of Death.

MALEDICTION UPON MYSELF

Now if the dull and thankless heart declare
That this fair city is no longer fair
Because the month has peopled it with shadows
And swept the quality to hills and meadows:
Yea, if it cry in its ingratitude
That holy beauty is no longer good
But that it is degraded and cast down
Because it treads the pavement of the town:
If it accept the rank ignoble rule
That beauty is no longer beautiful
Because it is not straitlaced and aloof
But sets its sandal on a London roof
And takes polluted Thames to be its mirror:
If the vile heart is guilty of this error
I here pronounce upon its inmost nerve
The malediction which it must deserve.
Loosen its strings: let it no longer be
The instrument of mortal ecstasy:
Empty its veins of rapture, and replace
The fine elixir with a foul and base
Till the true heaven never more descends
In delicate pulses to my finger ends,

Or flutters like a feather at my heel.
Bind blindness on my forehead: set a seal
On each of my two eyes which have forsworn
The light, and darken them with disks of horn.
Stop up my nostrils in default of breath
With graveyard powder and compacted death,
And stuff my mouth with ruin for a gag,
And break my ankles of a running stag:
Let the long legs of which I am so proud
Be bended, and the lifted throat be bowed:
Lower the arrogant pennon which I bear
Blown backward in the fringes of my hair
And let its silk be trampled to a skein
Of serpents knotted in corruptive pain:
Let these my words unwind the virtuous mesh
Which knits the spirit to the naughty flesh:
Let me dismember me in sacred wrath
And scatter me in pieces for a path
On which the step of that I have denied
Descends in silver to his proper bride.

KING'S RANSOM

About the Emperor's thumb revolving,
Mouthed by Manchu's enamelled dragon;
Upon the damasked barge, dissolving
Within the deep Egyptian flagon;

Downcast before the swine by Circe;
Poised between double diamond prisms;
Clipped by the horseshoe nail that hearsay
Declares a cure for rheumatisms;

If the artificer be Vulcan
Or microscopical Cellini
To set an eyeball for a falcon
Or carve a button for a genie;

And whether cupped in gold or copper,
In frigid silver or the burly
Embrace of bronze; stained by the upper
Cloud colours, or profound sea-pearly;

Whether consuming or congealing
In fire or salt; O never shall you
Find an enchantment for concealing
This little moon's enormous value!

TRUE VINE

There is a serpent in perfection tarnished,
The thin shell pierced, the purity grown
fainter,
The virgin silver shield no longer burnished,
The pearly fruit with ruin for its centre.

The thing that sits expectant in our bosoms
Contriving heaven out of very little
Demands such delicate immaculate blossoms
As no malicious verity makes brittle.

This wild fastidious hope is quick to languish;
Its smooth diaphanous escape is swifter
Than the pack of truth; no mortal can
distinguish
Its trace upon the durable hereafter.

Not so the obdurate and savage lovely
Whose roots are set profoundly upon trouble;
This flower grows so fiercely and so bravely
It does not even know that it is noble.

This is the vine to love, whose balsams
 flourish
Upon a living soil corrupt and faulty,
Whose leaves have drunk the skies, and
 stooped to nourish
The earth again with honey sweet and salty.

SPEED THE PARTING—

I shall not sprinkle with dust
A creature so clearly lunar;
You must die — but of course you must —
And better later than sooner.
But if it should be in a year
That year itself must perish;
How dingy a thing is fear,
And sorrow, how dull to cherish!
And if it should be in a day
That day would be dark by evening,
But the morning might still be gay
And the noon have golden leavening.
And beauty's a moonlight grist
That comes to the mills of dying;
The silver grain may be missed
But there's no great good in crying.
Though luminous things are mould
They survive in a glance that crossed them,
And it's not very kind to scold
The empty air that has lost them.

The limpid blossom of youth
Turns into a poison berry;
Having perceived this truth
I shall not weep but be merry.
Therefore die when you please;
It's not very wise to worry;
I shall not shiver and freeze;
I shall not even be sorry.
Beautiful things are wild;
They are gone, and you go after;
Therefore I mean, my child,
To charm your going with laughter.
Love and pity are strong,
But wisdom is happily greater;
You will die, I suppose, before long.
Oh, worser sooner than later!

INNOCENT LANDSCAPE

Here is no peace, although the air has fainted,
And footfalls die and are buried in deep grass,
And reverential trees are softly painted
Like saints upon an oriel of glass.

The pattern of the atmosphere is spherical,
A bubble in the silence of the sun,
Blown thinner by the very breath of miracle
Around a core of loud confusion.

Here is no virtue; here is nothing blessed
Save this foredoomed suspension of the end;
Faith is the blossom, but the fruit is cursèd;
Go hence, for it is useless to pretend.

HOSPES COMESQUE
CORPORIS

And if the heart may split the skin
Of this intrinsic chrysalis
To make the ephemeral ghost within
The fugitive it is:

If even the thinnest ravelling bind
Escape to the abandoned shell:
The heart must set the hollow mind
Replying like a bell.

Before division of the suns
Take shears to cut a second's thread,
The mind must tick ecstatic once
To prove that it is dead.

And the small soul's dissolving ghost
Must leave a heart-shape in the dust
Before it is inspired and lost
In God: I hope it must.



MIRANDA'S SUPPER

Virginia 1866

Between the solemn portico's
Column and column the lady goes;
Between the proud and painted stalks,
Plucked from Corinth, Miranda walks;
Pale, elegant, at point to vanish;
Her shoes are French, her shawl is Spanish;
Her silk in pure Manchurian rustles;
Three novices went blind at Brussels
To weave the enigma of her scarf;
Her lawns amazed the India Wharf
With webbed enchantment like a witch's
Before they flew in feather-stitches
To flounce her meanest petticoat.
A pair of cameos clasp her throat,
Wherein Psyche, pink and cream,
Slim-handed slants the candle-beam
On Cupid, swooning in carnelian;
Such trifles are antique Italian.

Miranda is a gentlewoman:
She met the invader as a Roman

Who scorns, above the screaming battle, a
Vercingetorix or Attila.

Fair-haired barbarian hordes disperse
Without the comment of a curse
From bitten lips like beads of coral;
She never made her anger oral.
She remained a marble memory
To the Cambridge Captain Amory.
She used him like a prince's legate,
But, oh, her eyes — her eyes were agate!
His mild and courteous Platonics
Shattered on flesh as firm as onyx;
She taught the boy to know his betters:
He saw the crown and heard the fetters.

Between the peony and rose,
Slim and sallow Miranda goes;
In light that's neither gold nor lunar,
This one later, and that one sooner;
Between the yellow and silver both,
Between the swallow and the moth,
Between the heavy walls of box.
Seven! Seven! cry all the clocks;

Five old clocks that chime in chorus,
One the gift of the Grand Duke Boris,
Malachite, with Peter in bronze
Setting his horse at the Persian guns;
The clock with a print of the Flying Castle;
The singing-bird clock that came from Basel;
Bonaparte's clock, with the bees worn shabby;
And the clock with the voice of an English
abbey.

Five aristocrats, gilt and argent,
Wound at the word of a raw top sergeant;
Wound by the paw of a brutal sentry,
To toll the obsequies of gentry,
In that Palladian temple standing
Empty over Peacock's landing.

Between the box and the brier stalks
Pensively Miranda walks;
The mingled scene is cool and acrid;
Conventual evening is sacred.
Night invests its vistas slowly, as
Moonlight blooms on the magnolias
Whose cups contain the Holy Ghost;
Nothing is lost! Nothing is lost!

The evening is an ardent chapel,
A garden fenced with flowering apple;
Every flower enfolds a candle
Impregnate with the breath of sandal
And ambergris; a chamber arrased
With prayer, where peace lies unembarrassed;
Lies asleep, and does not move
Under the arching orchard grove.
Nothing is lost, nothing is murdered;
All is safe and softly ordered.
Miranda kneels upon the grass;
The ruffles of her taffetas
Crackle and speak; the sound is crisper
Than her voice subdued to whisper.
The evening's vault is a cathedral;
Kneel and pray; forget the Federal!
Forget the foul receding fever;
Peace is immaculate as ever,
And seven thousand lovely acres
Once more Miranda's and her Maker's:
Edens relinquished one by one.

Miranda rises and goes on
To where upon a wooded crest a

Temple dedicate to Vesta—
Roman-Greek, a little bastard,
Pillars not of stone, but plastered—
Lends a look Hellenic-Latin
To a lawn like sea-green satin;
A structure elegant and airy,
They call the thing a belvedere.
Why does Miranda stand and shiver?
Here is Phoebe, with her quiver
Furred by moss, and here's Apollo;
But the summer-house is hollow,
Hollow are the negroes' quarters,
And far away, across the parterres,
The mansion hangs on a hill's summit,
Hollowness resounding from it;
Streaming from it like a pennant;
Desolation is its tenant.
Harps and horns and windy whistles
Overflow the empty vessels.
Where are all the souls that filled them?
Who has killed them? Who has killed them?
For a moment's space the lady
Feels her pulse's beat unsteady,

Hammering and helter-skelter;
But her heart is safe in shelter,
Willow-vaulted, verdant-pastured,
Secure in silver mail investured.

Miranda buckles on her courage.
Nevermore the beast shall forage,
Rooting with its bloody tushes
Among the rose and lilac bushes;
Trampling with devil-hooves of iron
The velvet gardens that environ,
Calm, austere, aloof, commanding,
The pillars and roofs of Peacock's Landing.

Miranda steps across the lawn
More precisely than a fawn
That shakes the dew from delicate ankles;
Nothing is wounded, nothing rankles,
Nothing is wicked, nothing whispers;
All is safe as a church at vespers,
On Christmas eve, when the bells cry Nowell!
Miranda takes her garden trowel;
She stoops, she kneels, she digs in the ground.
What is the thing that her hands have found?

Is it horror, or beautiful?
Is it a mandrake, is it a skull?
Is it a crucifix, is it a pistol?
The thing is a cup of Chinese Bristol.
Pure in colour, correct in shape,
Bright as embroidered Canton crepe;
Mongol faces, demure and pale,
Small as Miranda's finger-nail;
Almond eyes, impertinent, tilted,
Flowers of April suavely melted;
This is a cup to hold infusions
Of caravan tea reserved for Russians
Or brewed for the throat of a thirsty Manchu;
This is a charming cup, I grant you;
Better by far than the willow patterns
That make a lady's soul a slattern's!
Behold Miranda now uncover,
With lingering gestures of a lover,
A grave that brims with twenty moons
Filling the bowls of the silver spoons.
Her mind grew duller, her mouth grew muter,
Each time she stirred her tea with pewter,
Or touched a knife with a black bone handle;
Now she is lighted like a candle.

She tastes the sugar and the spice in
Simple porridge served on Meissin;
Gros bleu de Sevres, Italian faience,
Hold starvation in abeyance;
Poverty begins to shine,
The crust of bread is steeped in wine;
All the miracle of Cana
May be performed by painted china,
And even the portent of the mass
Imprisoned in a crystal glass.

Miranda wakens from the dead;
Soon her table shall be spread
With alchemy of Belfast looms;
Tapers shall enchant the rooms
And make them populous as once;
Power shall flow from every sconce;
Like Delphic tripods they shall burn.
All the Peacocks shall return
As the sea's uncounted pebbles;
All the gray and golden rebels,
Fallen down like stars, to spangle
Earth, upon the Bloody Angle;

The devout and ivory ladies,
Back from heaven, back from Hades,
Back from other earthier scenes,
Baltimore and New Orleans;
Back from exile, back from durance,
Home again to proud assurance.

Here, prepared within an upper
Chamber, is Miranda's supper.
Now partake; it is her body;
And the carven cup is bloody
Where her fingers drew it forth
From mortality of earth.
Every broken crust and crumb
Savours of your coming home,
And the berries she has gathered
By divinity are fathered.
Eat the bread she is adoring,
Drink the water she is pouring;

Now approach, both man and ghost;
Nothing is lost! Nothing is lost!

PETER AND JOHN

Twelve good friends
Walked under the leaves,
Binding the ends
Of the barley sheaves.

Peter and John
Lay down to sleep
Pillowed upon
A haymaker's heap.

John and Peter
Lay down to dream.
The air was sweeter
Than honey and cream.

Peter was bred
In the salty cold:
His hair was red
And his eyes were gold.

John had a mouth
Like a wing bent down:
His brow was smooth
And his eyes were brown.

Peter to slumber
Sank like a stone,
Of all their number
The bravest one.

John more slowly
Composed himself,
Young and holy
Among the Twelve.

John as he slept
Cried out in grief,
Turned and wept
On the golden leaf:

“Peter, Peter,
Stretch me your hand
Across the glitter
Of the harvest land!”

“Peter, Peter,
Give me a sign!
This was a bitter
Dream of mine —

“Bitter as aloes
It parched my tongue.
Upon the gallows
My life was hung.

“Sharp it seemed
As a bloody sword.
Peter, I dreamed
I was Christ the Lord!”

Peter turned
To holy Saint John:
His body burned
In the falling sun.

In the falling sun
He burned like flame:
“John, Saint John,
I have dreamed the same!

“My bones were hung
On an elder tree;
Bells were rung
Over Galilee.

“A silver penny
Sealed each of my eyes.
Many and many
A cock crew thrice.”

When Peter’s word
Was spoken and done,
“Were you Christ the Lord
In your dream?” said John.

“No,” said the other,
“That I was not.
I was our brother
Iscaiot.”

A STRANGE STORY

When I died in Berners Street
I remember well
That I had lights at head and feet
And a passing bell.

But when I died in Houndsditch
There came to lay me out
A washerwoman and a witch;
The rats ran about.

When I died in Holborn
In an old house and tall
I know the tapestry was torn
And hanging from the wall.

When I died in Marylebone
I was saying my prayers;
There I died all alone
Up four flights of stairs.

But when I died near Lincoln's Inn
The small gold I had
Surrounded me with kith and kin;
I died stark mad.

When I died in Bloomsbury
In the bend of your arm,
At the end I died merry
And comforted and warm.

THE PURITAN'S BALLAD

My love came up from Barnegat,
The sea was in his eyes;
He trod as softly as a cat
And told me terrible lies.

His hair was yellow as new-cut pine
In shavings curled and feathered;
I thought how silver it would shine
By cruel winters weathered.

But he was in his twentieth year,
This time I'm speaking of;
We were head over heels in love with fear
And half a-feared of love.

His feet were used to treading a gale
And balancing thereon;
His face was brown as a foreign sail
Threadbare against the sun.

His arms were thick as hickory logs
Whittled to little wrists;
Strong as the teeth of terrier dogs
Were the fingers of his fists.

Within his arms I feared to sink
Where lions shook their manes,
And dragons drawn in azure ink
Leapt quickened by his veins.

Dreadful his strength and length of limb
As the sea to foundering ships;
I dipped my hands in love for him
No deeper than their tips.

But our palms were welded by a flame
The moment we came to part,
And on his knuckles I read my name
Enscrolled within a heart.

And something made our wills to bend
As wild as trees blown over;
We were no longer friend and friend,
But only lover and lover.

“In seven weeks or seventy years —
God grant it may be sooner! —
I’ll make a handkerchief for your tears
From the sails of my captain’s schooner.

“We’ll wear our loves like wedding rings
Long polished to our touch;
We shall be busy with other things
And they cannot bother us much.

“When you are skimming the wrinkled cream
And your ring clinks on the pan,
You’ll say to yourself in a pensive dream,
‘How wonderful a man!’

“When I am slitting a fish’s head
And my ring clanks on the knife,
I’ll say with thanks, as a prayer is said,
‘How beautiful a wife!’

“And I shall fold my decorous paws
In velvet smooth and deep,
Like a kitten that covers up its claws
To sleep and sleep and sleep.

“Like a little blue pigeon you shall bow
Your bright alarming crest;
In the crook of my arm you’ll lay your brow
To rest and rest and rest.”

*Will he never come back from Barnegat
With thunder in his eyes,
Treading as soft as a tiger cat,
To tell me terrible lies?*

THE DEVIL IN SEVEN SHIRES

A Carol for Midsummer Eve

Come all ye sorrowful people
Who would escape my fires;
Climb to the top of the steeple
And I'll show you seven shires.

The first is the shire of rivers;
The shire of a double dream
Whose image never shivers
In its mercurial stream.

The towers of Ys have hollowed
Tall caverns in the waves,
So this smooth stream has swallowed
A hundred hermits' caves,

A hundred wells of peace, no less,
And not a single town;
This is the shire for weariness;
Dive into this, and drown.

The second is the shire of iron
Where swords grow up like grain,
And granite walls environ
A broad resounding plain.

This radiant plain amazes
All men of noble will,
Where daggers grow like daisies;
Leap into this, and kill.

The third is the shire of apples
That are sweeter than holy bread;
I have torn down all the chapels
And builded inns instead;

Cider and beer in barrels;
And no man needs to think
Of war or money or quarrels;
Drop into this, and drink.

The fourth is the shire of sovereigns;
They cover the ground like leaves.
Thank God no justice governs
This heaven of my thieves!

They say the gold was given in alms
For Jesus Christ His sake,
But if any of you have itching palms
Steal into this, and take.

The fifth is the shire of whispers;
Its willow trees have tongues,
And soft infernal vespers
Ring bells between their songs;

And if you would betray your lord
Or see your brother die,
It needs, perhaps, but half a word;
Creep into this, and lie.

The sixth is the shire of shadows;
It shines within a cloud;
Silver are all its meadows;
Its birds sing low and loud;

Its clover valleys lie asleep
Forgetting to be sad;
If you would bury sorrow deep,
Go seek it, and go mad.

The seventh is the shire of pigeons
Queen Venus calls her doves,
Of Puck's and Pan's religions
And Ashtaroath her groves.

Ho! Young man with the missal-book,
What are you dreaming of?
Look in the bower below you, look!
Lean into this, and love.

“AS I WENT DOWN
BY HAVRE DE GRACE...”

As I went down by Havre de Grace
I saw the laurel in the wood:
The hours (I said) are sands that pass,
And some are bad and some are good;
Some are black and some are bright,
Yet all were darker, I suppose,
In lands where laurel is waxen white
And never white suffused with rose.

As I went up by Forty Fort
I saw the dogwood on the hills:
Life (I said) is hard and short
And riddled by a hundred ills:
Yet how much heavier I had gone,
How far from all my heart's desire,
In lands where dogwood never shone
Twisted by a tongue of fire.

As I went on by Steepletop
I saw wild strawberries underfoot:

Life (I said) is a water-drop
That falls upon a rotten root:
Yet were my grave the more profound
And planted thick with worser seeds,
Had I been nourished in a ground
Where strawberries never grow wild like weeds.

As I looked over by Isle au Haut
I saw the balsam in the grove:
Life (I said) is a flake of snow
That melts upon the bough above:
And I am murdered and undone,
But I was not bred in the middle land
Or in any valley under the sun
Where these dark trees disdain to stand.

As I went out by Prettymarsh
I saw the mayflower under the leaves:
Life (I said) is rough and harsh
And fretted by a hundred griefs:
Yet were it more than I could face,
Who have faced out a hundred dooms,
Had I been born in any place
Where this small flower never blooms.

THE INNOCENTS

When the cock in the dish
Crew "Christus natus est!"
I saddled a wish
And rode from the west.

The ditches were piled
With young children dying:
I saw Herod's child
In a gold cradle lying.

At high white noon
In a tower turned south;
A silver spoon
Was in the child's mouth.

It was bright as a candle
And heavy as lead:
Carved on the handle
Was John Baptist's head.

I climbed like a cat;
I stole the metal;
I hammered it flat
To a silver petal.

I curled the leaf
To a silver bell
To echo the grief
Of Israel.

The dead were dumb
But it spoke for them:
By night I was come
To Bethlehem.

Mary's mantle
Covered the Christ:
With myrrh and santal
His hair was spiced.

I kissed the ground
Where the gold was tossed:
The bell made a sound
Like a young child lost.

“This bell is a bird
Or a shaken bud;
It speaks a word
The colour of blood.

“This bell is a cup
Or a thorny cap . . .”
The Christ sat up
In Mary’s lap.

“O take this bell
And stifle its breath,
For Israel
Is tired of death.

“When Herod’s boy
Lies broken and dying,
Give him this toy
To quiet his crying.”

THE COAST GUARD'S COTTAGE

Poor creature, come!
I should think shame to be afraid
Of what the waters and the winds have made
Flesh of a mortal man, lately my fellow:
Although the starving waves have stained you sallow
Or salty blue, indeed I shall not care,
Nor wonder at the seaweed in your hair,
Nor if your eyes be blind:
I swear I shall not mind
Such trifles, nor unkindly turn away
If I should find my shift dripping with spray.
Come, ghost, and lay
Your head upon my heart; you have come home.
Have cruel fishes made your kisses dumb?
You must not weep, my dear; 'tis bitter harm
They've done you, but the coverlid is warm,
And pity, softer than a feather bed,
Is comfortably spread
To soothe your body which the sea has broken;
Come, 'tis the truth I've spoken.
In this small cottage all the crying latches
Have told of you, and seawater in patches

Upon the stairs preserves the very print
Of your lost step; my pillows hold the dint
Of your cold, aching, and bewildered skull:
I'll never ask if you were beautiful
In life, or straight and slender:
Come, let me render,
As tenderly as my desires can
Peace to the shattered image of a man.
In this small cottage you and I alone
Move among wood and stone
And senseless things, and I alone am living,
Young, and unwounded; will you be forgiving
Of that unequal wrong
Which murdered you, and left me whole and strong?
It is some sad mistake;
Come, ghost, and take
The little warmth of my more vital limbs:
No creature flies or swims
Which can dismay my heart; you have come home.
I never was afraid of any ghost;
Dear love, you are not lost;
Nay, do not shiver; do not ever doubt.
Now blow the candle out;
Come to my bed;
I shall not be afraid.

WHERE, O, WHERE?

I need not die to go
So far you cannot know
My escape, my retreat,
And the prints of my feet
Written in blood or dew;
They shall be hid from you,
In fern-seed lost
Or the soft flakes of frost.
They will turn somewhere
Under water, over air,
To earth space or stellar,
Or the garret or cellar
Of the house next door;
You shall see me no more
Though each night I hide
In your bed, at your side.

UNWILLING ADMISSION

Here is the deep admission, whose profound
And difficult verity is out of reach
For loose adventure and impatient speech;
How, lying on your heart, I have not found
Treason nor failure in its mortal sound:
It is not necessary to beseech
A bodily vow to bind us each to each
Whose veins are rooted in heroic ground.

In such uncounted piercing of your side
Some river in heaven over-brimmed and
 broke,
And your least courage wore a lion's pride:
No several hammer of your pulses spoke,
Save to affirm, "The brave have never died,"
Though you and I must die at every stroke.

FALSE PROPHET

When I was forty, and two feathers sprung
Like crescents silver-curved from either
 temple,
Above a casque of bronze, I saw the simple
And casual shape of beauty; and my tongue
Spoke thus: "I am rejoiced I am not young
Lest this supreme and ultimate example
Of fine-spun flesh should very lightly trample
Upon my wounds; my withers are unwrung."

He might have been my son, save that my
 youth,
Bending the slender bow of its despair,
Loosed no such luminous arrow on the air;
His shaft was cut from some diviner bough:
And while my fainting heart perceived the
 truth,
My tongue spoke thus: "He cannot hurt me
 now."

A RED CARPET FOR SHELLY

I

But this is nothing; an eccentric joke,
The legendary patchwork of a year
Flung into muddiness, like Raleigh's cloak,
To ask the honour of your step, my dear.
Your path is printed on the atmosphere
Forever as a flame against the smoke
Of obscure vision, and I must invoke
Your magnanimity to make it clear.

If I might spread soft words like living grass
Laid smooth beneath the heavy wheels of
Time;
If I might loose the river of a rhyme
Or build a pavement out of gold and glass
Providing Heaven for you to walk upon,
It would be well; it would be better done.

II

The only engine which can fabricate
Language from spirit is the heart of each;
Industrious blood has braided into speech
The airy filaments of love and hate.
I have the labour of my own estate,
A pitiful machine which shall not reach
A single stellar thread; I cannot teach
Its narrow nerves the virtue to be great.

If my devout affection had been given
Commensurate power, which doubt nor
 custom dulls;
If I possessed the pure and fiery pulse
By true divinity informed and driven,
I would unroll the rounded moon and sun
And knit them up for you to walk upon.

III

The little sum of my experience
Remains the sole contrivance I produce
To weave this mesh, to colour and confuse
These ragged syllables with soul and sense.
I have been put to one supreme expense;
This was the noblest tincture I could use,
This the most subtle grain; I cannot choose
The dye to turn the lacklustre intense.

I have the proper scarlet of my veins,
The clean involved precision of my mind,
And you, who are so excellently kind,
Will not reject the tissue of my pains,
Stained by mortality's vermilion
To make a world for you to walk upon.

IV

Forgive the savage texture of the spoil
Tinted so barbarously by the clay
The rusty iron and the ocean-spray
Which lifted up my body from the soil.
Forgive the complicated brittle coil
Of my infirm invention, which I lay
Where you may pause, and pass, and never
 stay.

Here are the shocks of maize, the honey and
 oil,

The fruits like harvest moons, the fabulous
 land,
The crystal hills, the veiled prismatic plain;
And you will come, and you will not remain,
Nor leave a trace along the gilded sand.
So presently you will be come and gone;
Here's a strange road for you to walk upon.

ADDRESS TO MY SOUL

My soul, be not disturbed
By planetary war;
Remain securely orbéd
In this contracted star.

Fear not, pathetic flame;
Your sustenance is doubt:
Glassed in translucent dream
They cannot snuff you out.

Wear water, or a mask
Of unapparent cloud;
Be brave and never ask
A more defunctive shroud.

The universal points
Are shrunk into a flower;
Between its delicate joints
Chaos keeps no power.

The pure integral form,
Austere and silver-dark,
Is balanced on the storm
In its predestined arc.

Small as a sphere of rain
It slides along the groove
Whose path is furrowed plain
Among the suns that move.

The shapes of April buds
Outlive the phantom year:
Upon the void at odds
The dewdrop falls severe.

Five-petalled flame, be cold:
Be firm, dissolving star:
Accept the stricter mould
That makes you singular.

TO A BOOK

By some peculiar force centrifugal
Snatched from my mind's protective keeping
Your path is plain and unequivocal,
A lightning-feathered falcon, leaping
To trace a hieroglyph in heaven.
O little moon! O lucent circle!
You are beyond my reach, and even
Beyond the fortune of a miracle.
A stubborn archangelic levity
Has whirled you into alien ether
But still a silver thread of gravity
Must bind our pulses up together.
In your beloved veins the earthy
Is mingled with the superhuman
Since you are mine, and I was worthy
To suckle you, as very woman.

The seedling of another planet
That holds our own in light derision
You clove the subterranean granite
To rainbows of the rock's division:
And like an aureate grain of mustard
Folding a golden microcosm
You fell between my breasts, which fostered
The shape of your sidereal blossom.

Now you are flown upon a power
Whose sovereignty is half-deceptive:
For you are free, my dragon-flower,
And still forever you are captive.
You shall remain a moon untarnished
By all contagion of our metal.
Yet this inferior substance furnished
The roots of that elusive petal:

A moon remaining pure and luminous,
So far removed, yet never further,
No prophecy, however ominous,
Pollutes with spiritual murder.
O smaller than a pearl's beginning
Within my brain! what living virtue
Informed your growth, and set you spinning
Where no malicious dust can hurt you?
Above terrestrial malfeasance,
Above the ignorant delusion,
With summer in successive seasons
To light you in divine transfusion
Of crystalline and opalescent,
No arrow of the world can startle
Your lunar quietude, my crescent:
Remember that your birth was mortal.

LAST SUPPER

Now that the shutter of the dusk
Begins to tremble in its groove,
I am constrained to strip the husk
From everything I truly love.

So short a time remains to taste
The ivory pulp, the seven pips,
My heart is happy without haste
With revelation at its lips.

So calm a beauty shapes the core,
So grave a blossom frames the stem,
In this last minute and no more
My eyes alone shall eat of them.

LAMENT FOR GLASGERION

The lovely body of the dead,
Wherein he laid him down to rest,
Is shrunk to corruption's thread;
The blood which delicately dressed
The flying bone, the sighing breast,
One with nothingness is made.

The darling garment is outworn;
Its fabric nourishes the moth;
The silk wherein his soul was born,
Woven of flesh and spirit both,
Is crumpled to a pitiful cloth:
His soul lies naked and forlorn.

So one that walks within the air,
Who loves the ghost below the ground,
Rejoices fervently to wear
A body shaken and unsound;
A brow divided by a wound;
A throat encircled by a care.

Shall I go warm above the cold
Wherein he sleeps without a shroud
Or shred of beauty left to fold
About the poor soul's solitude?
The vanishing dust of my heart is proud
To watch me wither and grow old.

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TRAGIC DIALOGUE

“Does not the progressive wheel of years
Composed of baser metals
Obscure him from your eyes, whose tears
Have turned to willow petals?”

A hundred years! This iron bar
Has beaten you, and hindered?”
“Not so: on no extremest star
Had he and I been kindred.

Ah no, both happily and alas!
A clover field, a river,
A hawthorn hedge, a pane of glass
Had parted us forever.”

A NOTE ON THE TYPE
in which this book
is set

Pierre Simon Fournier (le jeune), who designed the type from which that used in this book is adapted, was both an originator and a collector of types. His services to the art of printing were his design of letters, his creation of ornaments and initials, and his standardization of type sizes. His types are old style in character and sharply cut. His ornaments resulted from his desire to make the vignettes of eighteenth-century French artists available to printers. In 1764 and 1768 he published his Manuel Typographique, a treatise on the history of French types and printing, on type-founding in all its details, and on what many consider his most important contribution to typography — the measurement of type by the point system (1 point now equals $\frac{1}{72}$ inch).



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